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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 4978
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 9115
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1770
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 5727
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003154

SIPDIS

NSC FOR DENNIS WILDER AND LIZ PHU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [MOPS](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: PEACEFUL PROTEST IN BANGKOK; EX-COP THREATENS
OCTOBER 22 CLASH

REF: A. BANGKOK 3143 (SOMCHAI NOT RESIGNING)

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 3042 (AFTERMATH OF CLASH)

[1](#)C. BANGKOK 2899 (CABINET APPOINTMENTS)

BANGKOK 00003154 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle, reason: 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The anti-government People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) held a peaceful protest in central Bangkok on October 20. A former high-ranking police official, Salang Bunnag, threatened publicly to lead ex-police officers in a move to clear PAD protestors from the Government House compound on October 22. An active duty Army Major General, Khattiya Sawasdiphol, threatened that pro-government civilians would take strong measures to resist a hypothetical military coup.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Salang was one of Thailand's most notorious police officials, infamously linked to extrajudicial killings. He essentially vanished from public view after his 1997 retirement. We are skeptical that the authorities will allow him to lead a mob into battle against the PAD at Government House, but his reemergence may reinforce Khattiya's effort to deter a coup d'etat, signaling that there are various groups prepared to take to the streets to resist a military seizure of power. These inflammatory statements appear to be poisoning political discourse and making it more difficult for reasonable people to ease the tension between various interest groups. This tension may further increase on October 21, when the court is scheduled to deliver its verdict in former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's abuse of power trial. End Summary and Comment.

PAD RALLIES IN CENTRAL BANGKOK

[1](#)3. (SBU) The anti-government People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) held a peaceful protest in central Bangkok on the morning of October 20. A group of approximately 200 people gathered at the Central World shopping mall and proceeded on foot to Lumpini park, coincidentally passing the U.S.

Embassy. The crowd grew to 1,000 by police estimates. PAD claimed that this group distributed 100,000 video discs showing graphic footage of the police crackdown on the October 7 PAD protest outside of the parliament (ref B). The demonstration disbanded by mid-day.

EX-COP THREATENS CLASH

14. (SBU) Former high-ranking police official Salang Bunnag (see biographic notes below) said publicly on October 18 that he would lead more than 1,000 former policemen in an effort to seize control of the Government House compound from PAD demonstrators. He said he would launch this operation on October 22, following a ceremony in which 10,000 Buddhist monks would provide a form of blessing. PAD co-leader Suriyasai Katasila said Salang's plan, if implemented, would result in a "bloodbath."

ANTI-ARMY ARMY GENERAL SPEAKS OUT

15. (SBU) Also on October 22, Major General Khattiya Sawasdiphol (see biographic notes below), speaking on a radio program, said that members of the pro-government United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) would fight in the streets against any military troops who might launch a coup d'etat. Khattiya, clearly allied with the UDD, said UDD supporters would use Molotov cocktails against the Army's armored vehicles. Khattiya criticized Army Commander Anupong Paojinda for having called publicly for Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat's resignation (ref A).

BIOGRAPHIC NOTES

BANGKOK 00003154 002.2 OF 002

16. (C) The general public considers Salang Bunnag as among the most amoral police officers in modern Thai history. Salang was born on March 5, 1937. He began his Royal Thai Police (RTP) career in April 1961. By 1981, he had become Deputy Commander of the Crime Suppression Bureau. In 1993, he became RTP Assistant Director General. In 1996, he became Deputy Director General, the post he held when he retired the following year. During his career, he was linked to extrajudicial killings. During the famous 1976 student uprising at Thammasat University, Salang -- then Deputy Superintendent of Crime Suppression Division 2 -- played a leading role in the crackdown on students; an infamous photograph showed Salang shooting casually at students. In 1996, Salang reportedly ordered police officers to kill six narcotics traffickers who had been taken into custody in Suphan Buri province; all six were found at the site of their arrest, shot in the head. After his retirement, Salang established the "Salang Bunnag Foundation," which provides free medicine to people with AIDS. Salang reportedly is close to current Public Health Minister (and former RTP officer) Chalerm Yoobamrung, who, per ref C, appears to have the support of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

17. (C) Major General Khattiya Sawasdipol, 58 years old, currently holds an inactive post at the Royal Thai Army Headquarters; his formal title is "Army Expert." During his career, he has been involved in operations against communist insurgents in Thailand's North and Northeast, and against ethnic Malay Muslim separatists in the South. Khattiya, also known by the nickname "Sae Daeng," has been politically active, running a website (www.sae-dang.com) that focuses on police corruption, among other issues. He reportedly is in the process of establishing a political party. Khattiya is the highest-ranking military officer who has openly supported the UDD; he reportedly leads a relatively small non-governmental guard force called "King Taksin's Warriors" that has provided security for the UDD. (King Taksin ruled in the 1700's, and his name is phonetically distinct from

that of former Prime Minister Thaksin.) Khattiya was on the scene on September 2, when UDD members clashed with PAD's security personnel, injuring dozens and killing one.

JOHN